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Written statement* submitted by the Al-Khoei Foundation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The Rise of Shiaphobia

Overview

The Al-Khoei Foundation would like to bring the Council's attention to the rise of a dangerous phenomenon known as Shiaphobia. This can be defined as the prejudice against or hatred of Shia Muslims based on their religious belief and heritage. Although this phenomenon has been largely confined to religious zealots, it has now become a global occurrence.

Symptoms range from banning the practice of faith, attacking followers; suicide killings, the systematic destruction of their places of worship and hate speech in sermons, satellite broadcasts and social media. Most worryingly, it is not limited to terrorist groups and fringe cells; rather it has become a common phenomenon in certain countries and has the support and backing of some States. They often fund and promote this ideology and discriminate against their Shia citizens in employment, education, and civil and political rights and on some occasions, put legislations in place to ban the practice of Shia Islam.

We have seen the global impact in places as far apart as Nigeria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Belgium, Egypt, Libya, Australia, Iraq and Syria. Most of these attacks escape international attention but when covered, it is often presented in light of sectarian conflict, rather than the outcome of the extremist ideology that sees the Shia Muslims as a legitimate target. A recent report by Agence France Press has highlighted the rise of this global phenomenon. [1]

The First Key Cause – Fundamentalism

Shiaphobia is caused by two main factors. The first is the rise of extremist reformulated ideologies that terrorize almost all ethnic and religious sub-groups of Islam, but Shias in particular. The second is the rise of political Shiaphobia, which may be caused by governments' geopolitical concerns.

The fundamentalist ideology associated with ISIL, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and similar groups asserts a moral and religious superiority to all other ideologies, and causes a complete unwillingness to countenance alternative ideas. This standpoint, in their eyes, legitimises heinous crimes committed on the basis of religious or ethnic differences. Such views find no basis in mainstream Islamic scholarship or thought but they have spread since the rise of Oil Prices in the last 4 decades. This rise has been aided by a sophisticated social media strategy alongside preachers who appear on satellite television channels. As a consequence, extremist violence towards Shias and other minorities such as the Christians, Sufi's, Ahmadi's and others have increased in parallel to the rise of extremist militant groups who uphold the ideology of hate in their teachings. Foremost in ISIL's publications, visual media and public statements is the ideological goal of eliminating all religions and sects that are considered "apostates" or enemies of Islam. They have terrorized and killed minorities such as Shias, Sufis, Christians, Yezidis and others and have subjected women to sexual violence and slavery. Despite the international military coalition strategy to confront ISIL, no serious effort have been made to dismantle ISIL's online operations and neutralise its network of recruiters who target Muslim communities and disaffected youths in cities across America, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

In the words of Andrew Hammond, a Middle East analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations, "I definitely think we're seeing a wave of anti-Shiite bigotry... which would not have happened before."

In 2003 there were over 214 attacks in Pakistan, with more than 400 Shias killed in a series of attacks.[2] Most of these attacks have been carried out in Shia mosques. The most recent one on 13th February 2015 in Peshawar, consisted of Taliban gunmen storming a Shia mosque during the Friday prayer, killing up to 20 individuals and injuring over 45.[3] The Hazara community in Pakistan have specifically been targeted and subjected to many suicide bombing and targeted

[1] http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/shiites-in-fear-as-deadly-bigotry-spreads-to-new-shores/article/415221
[2] http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper
[3] http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/blast-shiite-muslim-mosque-northwest-pakistan-kills-28940108

killings by extremists.[4] A report in June 2014 by Human Rights Watch also highlighted the atrocities being faced by the Shia Hazara in Balochistan, Pakistan.[5]

In Saudi Arabia, Shiaphobia is both a community and government phenomenon. According to the 2013 International Freedom Report, "the public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited; freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law. Shia and other Muslims who did not adhere to the government's interpretation of Islam faced discrimination."[6] Several anti-Shia attacks have occurred. For example, on 3rd November 2014[7], unidentified gunmen opened fire on a group of Shia men in the village of al-Dalwa, in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. This attack killed at least seven and wounded dozens as they left their local mosques after commemorating Ashura, a Shia religious ceremony. Saudi Arabia has also sentenced Shia activists to the death penalty. [8]"All the Saudi Shia want is for their government to respect their identity and treat them equally," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Yet Saudi authorities routinely treat these people with scorn and suspicion."[9]

In Nigeria, in another example of rising Shiaphobia, a suicide bomber at a Shia religious ceremony killed at least 15 people in a town in Potiskum.[10]

In June 2013,[11] the small village of Zawyat Abu Musalam, in Giza, Egypt, where 40 Shia families are residing was viciously attacked by extremists who burned five houses and lynched four Shias, including a prominent local figure, Sheikh Hassan Shehata.

In Benghazi, the capital of eastern Libya, a jihadi group uploaded a video of the execution of an Iraqi professor who admitted to being a Shia.[12]

Suicide bombings are a regular occurrence in Iraq, resulting in thousands of deaths and civilian casualties. Such attacks tend to occur mostly in Shia dominated areas. In June 2014, an attack near an old American base called Camp Speicher in Tikrit, separated 1700 Shias from a group of Cadets and executed them, is a horrific attack which remains unaddressed.[13]

Australia also experienced an anti-Shia attack where a religious community figure, Rasoul Al Musawi was shot in the face, an incident reported to have been motivated by sectarian tensions.[14]

On 13th March 2013, a Shia Imam in Belgium was murdered after the mosque was firebombed. According to reports, the 46-year-old imam perished from smoke inhalation in the Rida mosque in the suburb of Anderlecht, Brussels.[15]

In the United Kingdom, five men have been found guilty of assault and have been sentenced to Prison after a protest in 2013 which consisted of attacks against Shia Muslims on Edgeware road. [16]

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[4] http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/01/09/stemming-shia-hazara-killings-in-the-islamic-state-era/
[5] http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/pakistan0614_ForUplaod.pdf
[6] http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper
[7] http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/11/06/dispatches-killings-saudi-shia-wakeup-call
[8] http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/saudi-arabia-appalling-death-sentence-against-shi-cleric-must-be-quashed-2014-10-15
[9] http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/09/02/saudi-arabia-treat-shia-equally
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[11] http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/egypt-lynching-shia-follows-months-hate-speech
[12] http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/sunni-monarchs-back-youtube-hate-preachers-antishia-propaganda-threatens-a-sectarian-civil-war-which-will-engulf-the-entire-muslim-world-9028538.html
[13] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10902135/US-condemns-ISIS-mass-execution-as-White-House-signals-Iran-cooperation-on-Iraq.html
[14] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2818192/ISIS-live-forever-ll-kill-Terror-link-early-morning-drive-shooting-outside-Islamic-prayer-centre.html
[15] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17346927

The Second Cause – Politics

The second key cause has been the growing concern of Middle East governments about Shia Islam. With a population of around 200 million globally, the majority in Bahrain, Iran and Iraq, the Shia population has been a forgotten population in the Arab Spring. Bahraini activists were brutally silenced by their government, whilst Shias in Malaysia are imprisoned for peacefully practicing their religion. It is beyond the scope of our submission to speculate as to why this is the case. However, there is a clear trend which was not present even half a decade ago. Three key examples stand out. It should be noted that the actors are above all, governments.

In Indonesia, the ' Anti Shia Alliance" was held for the first time earlier last year, calling for "jihad", violence and sectarian purging against Shi'a Muslims. The convention resulted in an anti-Shi'a declaration, which included measures to maximize the prevention of the proliferation of "heretical" teachings by Shi'a Muslim followers, and demands made to the Indonesian government to ban Shi'a Islam.

A ban on Shi'a Islam is currently enforced in 11 out of the 14 States in Malaysia, originating from a fatwa that was released in 1996, by the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Affairs. This ban on Shia's contravenes Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012), the Islamabad Declaration (2007), the Amman Message (2004), the International Bill of Human Rights and the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Thus only the Sunni sect is permitted, denying followers of Shi'a Islam and other sects freedoms that are guaranteed in the Malaysian constitution. Earlier this year, the *Borneo Post* released an article expressing the need to deal with adherents of Shi'a Islam aggressively; it accused the Shias of distortion. (Borneo Post, 2013)

In Bahrain, a total of 45 religious sites, including historic mosques and shrines, have been demolished totally, damaged partially, or vandalized during the government's GCC-assisted military crackdown, aimed at quelling an anti-government protest movement, which emerged on February 14, 2011. A comprehensive report by the *Ja'afari Awqaf Administration,* a body that falls under the jurisdiction of the Bahrain Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, shows the majority of religious sites were razed to the ground, and that incidents of vandalism included arson attacks and the tampering and destruction of property. Damaged or destroyed sites include mosques, maatams (communal religious centers), shrines, and graveyards. The report is supported by legal documentation that contradicts the government's claim that all of the destroyed religious sites were built illegally. The first section of the seventh chapter in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, chaired by Mahmood Sharif Bassiouni, from paragraph 1306 to 1336 found that the authorities in the Kingdom of Bahrain have attacked a large number of Shia places of worship. It should be noted that the ruling family does not belong to this sect.

Casualties and Effects – Displaced people

According to the IOM, more than 1.3 million Iraqis have been confirmed displaced in 2014, in three distinct displacement waves 1) those displaced from the Anbar conflict starting in early January, 2) the Mosul conflict, which began in early June and 3) the Sinjar crisis in which began on 4 August. While many Iraqis have found their way to displacement camps, many are living in schools, mosques, and churches and unfinished buildings.

In Iraq, smaller religious communities, such as the Shia Turkmen, Feyli Kurds, Shabak and Kakais, which are generations old, are now targets in ISIL controlled areas and see little prospect of being able to return home. During a recent visit in October 2014 to Iraq by the Al Khoei Foundation, the three "Atabas" (the religious Shrine officials of Imam Ali, Imam Hussein and Imam Abbas) confirmed that they were providing support to an estimated 200,000 displaced Shia Turkmen. The advance of ISIL forced hundreds of thousands of Shia Turkmen to flee from their homes; they faced the prospect of execution, rape and imprisonment if they remained. They have been specifically targeted

[16] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2662726/Radical-Sunni-Islamists-face-jail-attack-group-Shiites-case-Muslim-sectarian-violence-Britain.html

because of their religious beliefs and because they inhabit areas in the north and west of Iraq which ISIL wish to incorporate into their self-declared caliphate.

Recommendations.

The Al-Khoei Foundation strongly urges the Council:

- To address the issue of Shiaphobia wherever it is present,
- To urge Member States to dismantle the social media network of ISIL, Al-Qaeda, and similarorganizations, in order to prevent the further spread of their ideology,
- To encourage Member States from mistreating their Shia citizens as part of their geopolitical concerns,
- To demand educational reforms in the aforementioned countries to encourage freedom of religion and though, plurality, respect of religious traditions and minorities and refraining from using teaching material for preaching hate and discord,
- To implement mechanism in order to hold non-state actors accountable for their crimes,
- To develop international instruments in finding appropriate mechanism to protect sacred and heritage sites across the globe,
- To share good practices wherever they exist,
- To encourage conditions for the promotion of their identities.

We call on all Council members to promote equal protections for Shias and other religious minorities under the law, and to combat impunity for targeted violence around the world.

Thank you